

Workforce Observations

For The North Central WDA

April, 2002



Lion and Lamb Duel for Position in March

The spring month of March was anciently named for the god of war, who even today may appear in political cartoons and propaganda art as a warrior in full panoply with a drawn sword. In a time when agriculture was king people went to war in this month. Or perhaps our ancestors simply regarded this late winter-early summer period as a turbulent and uncertain time, and so it often is. But, the weather is not the only thing noted for unpredictability during the month of March. There is often unpredictability in the affairs of men as well, especially as regards activity in the labor market, both in the Upper Wisconsin River Valley and around the state.

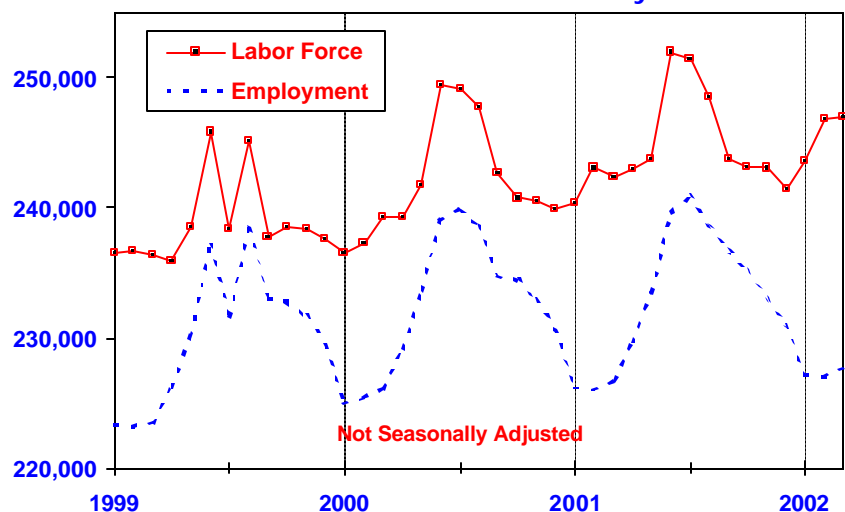
The Industrial Sectors –

One common way to look at the employment picture is to examine movement in the various elements of the job picture, especially job levels in the different industrial areas compared to the previous month and the same period of 12 months ago. What does a glance at the most recent month reveal about the situation in the River Valley? On the very surface of things it appears placid enough, with strong levels in every industry. Manufacturing, a somewhat troubled element these last few years, was strong in March, with employment levels in the nine county River District holding at about 42,000 workers. Paper makers, the largest employers in this industry, have seen their share of rough going, dealing with now-chronic overcapacity worldwide and other problems that have caused some dislocations in our area, especially the Wood – Portage County areas. But, job levels in nondurable goods manufacturing (paper's sector) were strong in March, nearly identical to February and down less than 1,000 from March of 2001. Of course, nondurable goods is also effected by employment changes in food products and related and a few others, but paper is the main concern in our area. Could these strong job

numbers bode well for months to come?

One industry that draws our attention, especially at this time of the year, is that of construction. While it is certainly the smallest, activity there is regarded as an important indicator of business growth. Also, in our part of the state, there are several firms that feed this sector, in the form of doors, windows, structural metals, and the innumerable elements of the building trades. The spin-off from vigorous construction activity in any given area is wide and effects not only allied manufacturing, but retail and wholesale trade, as well. And, of course, the construction workers

**Civilian Labor Force
Wisconsin River Valley**



themselves tend to be amongst the better paid in the blue-collar workforce, which means more money in the local economy. Employment levels in construction have been high for some time and were several hundred higher in March than in February. Could this mean a strong summer ahead?

March of this year seems to have been a bit of a peacefully grazing lamb, unaffected by serious economic problems elsewhere. But, is there a lion there, after all? Have the placid levels of employment been hiding something more turbulent? The continuing uncertainty in paper has already been mentioned. And as strong as construction has been lately, it actually lost about 1,000 jobs since March of 2001.

There are also reports that building permits are down, at least in the central part of the state. If this is true everywhere, it could be that jobless levels in the construction sector will not only even out, but drop slightly this summer after several strong years. And in the north, many are recovering from a poor winter in the tourist trade, as bad weather and an economic downturn conspired to keep people close to

the home fires and off the snowmobile trails. Will the apparently strong levels in the trade sector hold? And, a recent plant closing in Rhinelander has cast a pall over that area, as well.

Time Will Tell—

Probably a month or better will have to pass before we know enough to say with any certainty

what the warmer months hold for workers in the River Valley. The signs are mixed and interpretation difficult.



Mont of March	Adams	Forest	Lang.	Lincoln	Mara.	Oneida	Portage	Vilas	Wood	Region
Labor Force	7,952	4,955	9,595	15,091	77,253	31,912	38,116	11,353	42,502	238,729
Employed	7,316	4,486	8,580	13,675	72,113	29,048	35,484	10,308	38,798	219,808
Unemployed	636	469	1,015	1,416	5,140	2,864	2,632	1,045	3,704	18,921
Unemployment rate(%)	8.0	9.5	10.6	9.4	6.7	9.0	6.9	9.2	8.7	7.9%
Total, all industries**	3,774	3,339	7,705	11,964	69,416	17,299	32,392	7,593	44,662	198,144
Construction & Mining	140	52	225	374	2,363	987	787	727	1,277	6,932
Manufacturing	407	468	1,649	3,823	17,647	1,968	5,558	432	9,532	41,484
Transportation & Util.	191	231	423	463	4,232	662	1,964	179	3,304	11,649
Wholesale Trade	114	41	352	391	5,155	538	1,491	243	1,417	9,742
Retail Trade	768	467	1,694	2,190	13,338	4,612	6,081	2,058	8,169	39,377
FIRE	94	95	263	729	4,721	443	3,678	297	954	11,274
Services	858	428	1,876	1,884	14,038	5,256	6,985	1,511	14,459	47,295
Government	1,202	1,557	1,223	2,110	7,922	2,833	5,848	2,146	5,550	30,391
Change from previous mo.	Adams	Forest	Lang.	Lincoln	Mara.	Oneida	Portage	Vilas	Wood	Region
Civilian Labor Force*	10	-31	-25	64	83	11,330	67	-12	-165	11,321
Employed	-63	-13	-59	63	1	10,309	-181	0	-147	9,910
Unemployed	73	-18	34	1	82	1,021	248	-12	-18	1,411
Unemployment rate(%)	0.9	-0.3	0.4	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.6	-0.1	0.0	0.1
Total, all industries**	50	66	66	-15	245	91	329	-14	352	1,170
Construction & Mining	21	15	15	-12	98	65	39	30	64	335
Manufacturing	3	1	1	-49	-12	-94	-10	5	16	-139
Transportation & Util.	5	6	6	9	48	-1	10	1	43	127
Wholesale Trade	4	-3	-3	6	48	2	11	1	-2	64
Retail Trade	0	14	14	38	35	71	53	-51	69	243
FIRE	1	5	5	5	10	6	-26	0	4	10
Services	0	11	11	7	63	10	104	-29	128	305
Government	16	17	17	-19	-45	32	148	29	30	225
Change from year ago	Adams	Forest	Lang.	Lincoln	Mara.	Oneida	Portage	Vilas	Wood	Region
Civilian Labor Force*	-79	439	-45	197	1,115	11,971	614	223	1,143	15,578
Employed	-233	390	-243	-141	18	10,568	-15	142	327	10,813
Unemployed	154	49	198	338	1,097	1,403	629	81	816	4,765
Unemployment rate(%)	2.0	0.2	2.1	2.2	1.4	1.7	1.6	0.5	1.7	0.1
Total, all industries**	-49	328	-113	-226	134	177	234	137	815	1,437
Construction & Mining	25	4	-93	-142	-406	113	-135	-32	-178	-844
Manufacturing	-23	-45	-118	-485	-1,288	-88	-238	-69	-354	-2,708
Transportation & Util.	27	30	35	20	353	-10	155	-23	101	688
Wholesale Trade	19	-1	-128	-13	158	180	-161	107	52	213
Retail Trade	-35	29	-134	-69	1,197	19	89	222	186	1,504
FIRE	-3	5	13	476	-125	3	-27	-12	66	396
Services	-74	-19	357	58	302	-95	45	-102	922	1,394
Government	15	325	-45	-71	-57	55	506	46	20	794

* Includes participants residing in area. ** Includes employment with employers located in area. Estimates are NOT seasonally adjusted. Current month estimates are preliminary. Totals may not add due to rounding. Calculations based on unrounded numbers.

Look for the most current Labor Market Information at: WWW.DWD.STATE.WI.US/LMI
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